

Police training

Officers train at old school building

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The call came just after 1 p.m. An active shooter was in the building and response teams were needed immediately.

The call came in from Deputy Chief Stephen McDonald, informing the officers that an active shooter was in the school — and that was just about all the information that was available. Two officers entered through the front door of the old Duxbury High School building with their rifles drawn and wearing protective gear. They approached a hallway slowly, moving in determined steps and observing the situation. While one officer pulled the doors open, the other focused down the hallway, keeping an eye out for the shooter.

The two made their way down the hallway, moving along the lockers and past classrooms where students were in lockdown. When the shooter became aggressive, the officer shot back, eventually knocking the shooter down.

As the two first responders worked to secure the area, five more officers came into the building, moving down the hallway and checking for secondary threats. When it was determined the area was secured and clear, the officers quickly evacuated the students down the hallway and outside the school.

When the students were safe, the shooter stood up and shook the officers hands.

Duxbury Police officers responded to the old high school building last Thursday as part of a week of active training shooting. The trainings included two full days of K9 training in the old high school building with two different regional K9 groups that came in from all over southeastern Massachusetts. The Metropolitan Law

Continued on page 4



Duxbury police officers underwent tactical training at the old high school last week.

Photo by Gillian Smith

1 of 3

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Continued from page 1

Enforcement Council (MetroLEC), of which Duxbury is a member agency, spent a day at the school doing tactical training, and the Southeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council (SEMLEC) utilized the building last Wednesday to test new night vision equipment. The Duxbury Fire Department also got the chance to do tactical movement training with the police department at the school.

"We wanted to make sure that our regional partners had an opportunity to utilize the facility," Clancy said. "This is also a new era for us as we plan to work with the medics, getting them into the area as quickly as possible and a lot earlier than in the past, from lessons learned."

Throughout the week of training, the Duxbury Police Department set up several active shooter scenarios, working on responding to one shooter versus multiple shooters, and using different numbers of responding officers, depending on the situation. While the officers were actively engaged in an exercise, the police department also worked on breaching drills, such as how to get through a locked steel door.

Deputy Chief Stephen Mc-Donald said the most important factor in these situations is time.

"Time is absolutely critical for law enforcement to get on scene here to address the threat," he said. "We don't have time to delay. We have to get in there."

In less than 15 minutes, the Aurora, Colorado shooter killed 12 people and left 58 wounded. The Virginia Tech shooter killed 33 people and wounded 17 in less than 11 minutes. McDonald said the average response time is 10-15 minutes and a significant portion of the drills last week was figuring out how to respond as quickly as possible.

Prior to the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, the protocol was to respond to the shooting, secure the area, assemble a swat team and brief the team before it entered the building.

"That entire time there were children inside the building getting shot and bleeding to death," Clancy said. "That's when it all changed."

Now, the protocol is for the average patrol officer to go in and immediately address the threat. The first two or three officers on duty respond and immediately address the situation, while SWAT teams respond to the incident immediately thereafter. Even though the first responders may have the shooter secured, there may still be other threats, such as secondary devices elsewhere in the school.

If a shooting were to occur in Duxbury, members from the State Police SWAT team, Metropolitan Law Enforcement Council team and Southeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council would respond to the incident to evacuate and completely clear the school.

Clancy said there were several lessons learned from the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012. Because of a design flaw, there was only one road leading to the school.

"The first two or three cops did exactly what they were supposed to: get there, go right in and try to make contact," he said. "But before more assets got there, parents started coming in and that road was choked so what you had was troopers and police officers running for a block with their gear because they couldn't get their vehicles down there."

In Duxbury, there are plans in place to secure the area and shut down the roads leading to the schools while also providing a place for parents to go to wait for information and eventually be reunited with their children.

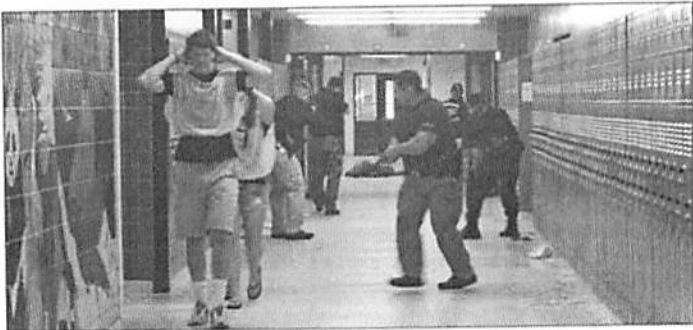
2 of 3

The police department is working with the schools to set up a system that will immediately notify parents in the event of an emergency and will provide them with details on where to go for more information. With the new middle-high school building opening this fall, Clancy said the department will treat emergency situations the same way they would if they were in a mall or similar building, because the layout of the school is so unique. Officers will spend time training in the new school as well and were able to walk through the new school last week to set up response plans. Emergency drills are run a couple of times throughout the school year at all of the schools.

"We are going to make some changes to some of the options that we are giving faculty and staff with how to respond in the next couple of months," Clancy said. "That is very new and exciting for us."

McDonald said he thought the drills were successful and went according to plan.

"I think the patrol staff got a really good idea of what is going to be expected from them," he said. "We refreshed their tactics, went over the procedures and policies and they have a good 360 degree view of what is expected of them in one of these incidents."



A Duxbury Police officer evacuates students during an active shooter training last week.

Photo by Gillian Smith